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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000619

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT TOURE READY TO TARGET AQIM, WITH HELP

REF: A. BAMAKO 387
1B. BAMAKO 608

Classified By: Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Ambassador Milovanovic met with President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) on September 17 to reinforce the need for Malian cooperation with the extensive program of training and equipping the Malian Army to confront Al Q,Aeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the North of Mali. ATT said he is committed to the fight against AQIM and will take measures to ensure that vehicles and other equipment are dedicated to that purpose. He is planning a heads of state meeting with the leaders of Algeria, Mauritania, and Niger in October or early November and to resume operations against AQIM in Northern Mali in November or early December. End Summary.

12. (C) Ambassador Milovanovic met with President Amadou Toumani Toure on September 17 to reinforce the need for Malian cooperation with the extensive program of training and equipping the Malian Army to confront Al Q,Aeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the North of Mali. The Ambassador opened by noting that, while she had requested a meeting to discuss military cooperation, the U.S. commitment to Mali was much broader than that. She noted that she and the Minister of Foreign Affairs were preparing to sign four agreements later the same day amounting to a total of USD 55 million in new assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development, covering the fields of health, education, governance, and economic growth.

13. (C) Turning to security cooperation, the Ambassador noted that, in a recent meeting (REF A), ATT had invited U.S. military planners to work directly with Malian military counterparts on plans to remove AQIM and that a U.S. Africa Command planning team had visited Mali in an effort to comply with his request. On the basis of that visit, a plan was devised to support the Malian government's own strategy. In support of that plan, the U.S. Government has delivered the long anticipated 37 vehicles, radio and communications equipment, and clothing and other individual equipment worth approximately USD 5.5 million. Pending authorization, the U.S. Government hopes to provide additional vehicles, supplies, and logistics equipment over the course of the coming year. In addition to vehicles and supplies, the U.S. Government will be continuing to provide significant training through planned Joint Combined Exchange Training. In the current fiscal year, for example, she noted that U.S. Special Operations Forces had conducted 11 training exercises, and expects to conduct an additional 11 exercises in the coming year.

14. (C) The Ambassador noted that the level and depth of assistance demonstrates the commitment of the U.S. Government towards supporting the strong and valuable Malian democratic tradition. At the same time, the U.S. Government requires that several basic conditions be met. The vehicles and equipment are intended for the exclusive and permanent use of the specialized units, dedicated to the fight against AQIM

(the so-called Echelons Tactiques Inter-Armes, or ETIAs). Training needs must be aligned with the needs of conditions in the North. With further respect to training exercises, the Malian military leadership must make an effort to identify the best possible troops for training exercises and will seek to ensure that those individuals and units who have successfully participated in past training exercises will be chosen for future training so as to maximize the effectiveness of those units conducting operations.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador said that the recently completed Navy SEALS training of the 33rd paratroop brigade was largely successful. The SEAL commander had reported that the Malian troops performed eagerly and professionally and would be an ideal force to work with the ETIAs in the fight against AQIM. They appeared to be well prepared for airborne operations but also performed very well on ground maneuvers.

¶6. (C) ATT thanked the Ambassador for all of the ongoing U.S. assistance to his country and for the excellent cooperation she had shown. He said people in the North have a difficult time determining, "behind the beards" of Arabs they do not know personally, whether they are dealing with an honest, well-meaning person or a terrorist. For the time being, there are no indications of AQIM gaining a foothold amongst the local population. On the contrary, people have turned against AQIM. Keeping the youth on the side of the government, however, is key, and he said he is pursuing a strategy of incorporating Songhai, Tuareg, and Arab youth into the military. The local population knows how to survive and fight in the desert, and their knowledge needs to be tapped.

¶7. (C) ATT gave the Ambassador his personal assurances that the vehicles and equipment provided by the United States

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would be used by the ETIAs only. The Ambassador thanked the President for his commitment, and said the Embassy would be transmitting a diplomatic note shortly to outline our requirements. She noted that in reports she had gotten of the still ongoing U.S. Army bilateral training of ETIA 1 in Gao, it was clear that the soldiers had come to the exercise ill-equipped, without proper uniforms and boots, with broken rifle stocks and with a maximum of one rifle cartridge per soldier, compared to the five to seven cartridges Army special operations forces had been expecting to see. She said the U.S. Government needs the Malian military to prepare trainees so they can take full advantage of training, which is expensive to provide. ATT said he understood. He claimed that the Malian military has supplies, but has a policy of holding them in reserve for actual operations rather than expend it in training. He nevertheless saw the logic of not being able to develop an effective fighting force without having done any real, live training. He pledged that future ETIAs would train with the same quality of equipment used to deploy. He said he would initiate an order for after-training reports, so that he could monitor progress more closely. He stressed the importance that training continue, noting that a change of generations in the military was leaving a lot of inexperienced officers and enlisted men in place. Most of the dead in June/July clashes with AQIM , he said, were young and inexperienced.

¶8. (C) ATT said that as a follow-up to the August 13 meeting of Algerian, Malian, Mauritanian, and Nigerian Chiefs of Defense in Tamanrasset, Algeria, a heads of state meeting would take place in Bamako, most probably in October or early November. ATT noted that, after years of public carping that the other side was not doing enough, or actually acting in league with terrorists, there appeared to be a new will on the part of Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger to work together. ATT said the Malians told the Algerians in Tamanrasset the Malians needed air cover and real time intelligence as to the location of highly mobile AQIM elements in Northern Mali. The Algerians were also told that they know the Salafists best, and need to share information about them so that the Malian military can be more effective at countering them.

¶9. (C) He characterized relations with Mauritanian

President Aziz and Algerian President Bouteflika as good and noted that they were taking measures to include Libyan leader Qadhafi, who had been feeling left out. ATT noted that all of the concerned countries were establishing counterterrorism cells, and Mali's would be headed by the former Governor of Gao, General Amadou Baba Toure (as was reported IIR 6 958 0109 09).

¶110. (C) He said that in November or December, the Malian military would start large-scale operations in the North. He maintains a company of airborne troops in the North, with a rotation of every three months. It is vital, he said, to establish permanent bases in the North if the Government of Mali is to secure the region. This will contribute to reassuring the population.

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